



State Can't Become Divided Over Routes for Rail

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The continued warring between supporters of high-speed rail will result in just one outcome if they don't regain their focus: Everyone will lose. It's imperative to agree on a good system now, and keep working to make the system great later.

The debate that's hung on for years is whether the small section of the rail line taking passengers from the Valley to the Bay Area should go over the Altamont or Pacheco passes. It's not going to matter if the system doesn't get started.

The groups that should be partners keep lobbing burning arrows at each other, and if they don't watch out, they may find they have torched the enthusiasm of supporters caught in the crossfire.

In time, the exciting high-speed rail system will serve all the state very well, but for now, supporters need to steel their points of agreement, band together and get this project started. That begins with a united front to pass Proposition 1, which will be on the November ballot. This proposal will authorize \$9.9 billion in state borrowing to jump-start the 800-mile rail.

High gas prices and concerns about air quality are stimulating even car-loving voters to view mass transit in a new way, providing an excellent opportunity for passage of the measure. A recent Field Poll showed Proposition 1 leading 56% to 30%, with 14% undecided. The initiative requires a simple majority to pass.

This is clearly a moment in time where Californians are believing that uncommon times call for uncommon solutions, and the supporters of high-speed rail should be gleeful. Right now, voters are eager to try something new if it means loosening the noose foreign oil dependence has looped around their necks. High-speed rail touches all of our hot political spots right now: It would improve the environment, our national security and our economy by providing thousands of well-paying jobs -- just what California needs during such dire economic times.

This is not risky business, but a proven strategy for success. During the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration built thousands of miles of roads, nearly 1,000 airports, 124,000 bridges, parks, schools and government buildings, and employed millions of Americans in that devastating economic time. California doesn't have to wait for the feds to tell us what to do; we are wise enough to stimulate our own economy.

There will be enough resistance to rail coming from people getting rich off competing industries; those who stand to profit if high-speed rail dies. And there will always be negative people whose imaginations cannot fathom such a forward-thinking amenity for California -- even though it's being done beautifully and successfully elsewhere.

This is not the time for partners to fight each other -- it's time to charge ahead together.

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